

Civil Service Reform in Comparative Perspective: The Case of Local Government Change in Mexico and the United States

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SYNOPSIS

This case study compares civil service reform efforts in the State of Mexico and Summit County, Ohio. Historically, recruitment and selection of government employees has been the most controversial and politically charged personnel endeavor. Thus, this case examines the political environment within which civil service reform is being attempted in both jurisdictions. Data for this study were collected from interviews with high-ranking state and county administrative officials in both jurisdictions.

This study found that the search for an ideal civil service has caused both systems to become mired in politics and unrealistic objectives. Both Mexico and Summit County have struggled to change the realities and the public perception of its civil service systems. Both suffer in comparison to models available to the public. Political leadership of Mexico and Summit battle the public vision of the proper way of operating a civil service system.

Keywords: civil service system, local level, administrative employees, comparative perspective.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study compares civil service reform efforts in the State of Mexico and Summit County, Ohio. The study is timely because officials within the Fox Administration and Summit County are currently grappling with how to run government more efficiently, economically, and equitably through civil service reform. Both governments are using models of civil service systems from other jurisdictions, and, in the case of Mexico, the U.S. Civil Service system is viewed as an *ideal* model. Historically, recruitment and selection of government employees has been the most controversial and politically charged personnel endeavor. Thus, this case examines the political environment within which civil service reform is being attempted in both jurisdictions. Data for this study were collected from interviews with high-ranking state and county administrative officials in both jurisdictions.

Our modern understanding of objective merit-based civil service rests on neutral objectivity in the hiring processes. This study found that the search for an ideal civil service has caused both systems to become mired in politics and unrealistic objectives. Both Mexico and Summit County have struggled to change the realities and the public perception of its civil service systems. Both suffer in comparison to models available to the public. Political leadership of Mexico and Summit battle the public vision of the proper way of operating a civil service system.

Valuable lessons have been learned. First, and foremost, is that civil service reform is a *slow* process. In the United States full implementation of civil service precepts took several decades. Secondly, the greatest single failure of both the system in Mexico and Summit County is the lack of clear career paths for professionals. It must be remembered that civil service systems are career systems, designed to offer the opportunity and possibility of a career in the public service free of political or other influences. The critical issue is finding the balance point – the point where civil service reform is possible without necessarily imitating a century old model of control and management. Our recommendation is that civil service systems “start in the middle” with a focus on the salary structure and job classification of the technical professionals. Starting “in the middle” works precisely because the patronage pressure is minimal and the efficacy of credential-based hiring is the greatest. This serves both the need for professional competence in the public service and acknowledges the connection between policy-making and politics.

WHY PERSONNEL?

This case study is instructive for students interested in learning more about public personnel management in a rapidly changing work environment. The case emphasizes the importance of leadership, ethics, “neutral” competence, rep-

representative bureaucracy and equitable employment practices in the public sector. Students will learn that change in public personnel management is not an easy process. It requires patience, dedication, and commitment to achieve honest reform leading to good governance. These lessons are clearly illustrated in the on-going struggle for civil service reform in the State of Mexico and Summit County. Thus, this case study contains valuable lessons for students seeking to understand the deliberative nature of change within public personnel systems involving the recruitment, retention, and promotion of public sector employees.

Seven critical insights gained from our examination of the experiences with civil service reform in Summit County, Ohio and the State of Mexico, Mexico are:

- That reform creates political problems for both advocates and proponents. Any change inevitably seems too little and too inconsequential; no matter what is done, no one is satisfied.
- That reform efforts leap and spurt in fits and starts; there is little pattern. Therefore, change will be slow.
- That assuring a system is in place to hire and retain technical professionals, who are protected from political change, should be a priority.
- That political “responsiveness” and open hiring have a place in government. Such hiring need not conflict with the broader aim of a professional civil service.
- That the existence of a rationally constructed and internally consistent salary system is critical.
- That civil service systems are career systems.
- That bureaucratic infighting as often as “politics” has halted progress in civil service reform.

INTRODUCTION

Creation of civil service systems in Europe and then the United States in the nineteenth century is a seminal act in the evolution of “professional” government. Whereas the nineteenth-century concern was to find people to fill government jobs (i.e., recruitment), the twentieth-century concern was to match the skills of the recruit to the demands of the job (i.e., selection). Our modern understanding of objective, merit-based civil service systems rests on assumptions of neutral objectivity in selection processes. Neutral selection includes job analysis and position classification, (Cox, Buck and Morgan, 1994).

But what happens if that objectivity is lacking, or if this pursuit of objectivity produces results that are politically or socially undesirable? Herein lie the questions to be considered in our examination of civil service change efforts in the State of Mexico, Mexico and the County of Summit, Ohio. The State of Mexico and Summit County are struggling with reform efforts. Both “judge” the depth, and, therefore, the “quality,” of their reforms against the standards of a classic civil service system.

Classic systems treat personnel processes as mechanistic operations. Employees are recruited from a pool of applicants, meeting pre-established guidelines. The hiring process is circumscribed by restrictions on information. For example, employment applications and interview questions are carefully screened to avoid illegal questioning while making certain that bona fide occupational qualification questions are included. From this perspective fundamental tenets of personnel practice are simplistic. Absenteeism should be reduced; employee turnover is deplored. Hiring is based upon the applicant’s “fit” with the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) as defined in position classification guidelines. Promotion is based on merit. In many cases, a personnel manager could organize his or her office using this “by-the-book” and somewhat robotic approach. However, the manager learns nothing of why employees behave as they do. This approach to personnel management

ignores the context in which people work – a critical element to understanding public sector personnel practice.

An alternative view begins its examination of personnel practices from the perspective of how to utilize the contributions of government personnel to achieve the objectives of governance. This more dynamic view of personnel practice places personnel management at the center of governmental activity. The “government” does not exist independent of its employees. People working in government determine, in large part, the kind of government we have. Conversely, government works the way it does because of its personnel systems (see Berman, Bowman, West and Van Wart, 2001; Dresang, 1984; Nigro & Nigro, 2000; and Shafritz, Hyde, and Rosenbloom, 1986). Public personnel administration is more than a series of steps or organizational constructs. It is more than recruitment, hiring, retention, job analysis, evaluation, and promotion. It is a cluster of activities that are changing and evolving, with some activities changing more rapidly than others. Furthermore, and critically, personnel practice is shaped and influenced by political goals and expectations. This leads to two important ideas. First, changes in governance can be understood more clearly by examining the changes in personnel practice. Secondly, by learning how the personnel system and the government interact, we can predict and, to some extent, make suggestions that may facilitate more effective governance in the near future.

Using our experience with and interviews of those involved in civil service reform in Mexico and Ohio we propose to develop an assessment of the state of local government personnel practice. The case emphasizes the importance of leadership, ethics, neutral competence, representative bureaucracy, and equitable employment practices in the public sector. To do this we must first understand the historic context for the evolution of current personnel practices in both jurisdictions. Our goal is to help merit system reformers recognize not only what government personnel practice is, but also what it is becoming.

The necessary first step, then, is to understand from where it came.

CIVIL SERVICE IN HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

Recruitment and selection of government employees has long been the most controversial and politically charged personnel endeavor. Not surprisingly, many reform efforts focused on hiring processes. Who the government hires is a very clear statement of political and social policy. Whatever the choice, the process of hiring creates a work force that reflects society in its political, economic, and social character.

The Spoils System¹

American moralism condemns the spoils system of political appointment by the victorious in popular elections (U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1941, p.20). Americans are so imbued with ideals of merit that the notion of patronage is offensive. Indeed, in common parlance, to be “patronized” is considered an insult. Despite the fact that patronage – or the spoils system – is enthusiastically supported in some areas of this country and abroad, our twenty-first century perspective condemns the practice. In the early nineteenth century, however, the spoils system was regarded with respect. During the (American) federalist period, the personnel system had been based upon personal rather than political connections and was looked upon as vaguely undemocratic. The argument advanced by proponents of political patronage was that the political will of the people had been demonstrated by their electoral preference for one party over another. This will was thwarted when officeholders of the *losing* party were retained in office (Rohr, 1986)². In fact, the spoils system of pa-

¹ During the Senate debate on the nomination of Martin Van Buren as minister to Great Britain, Senator William Marcy coined the phrase “to the victor belong the spoils of the enemy” in his defense of Van Buren’s spoils policies.

² This argument is still used today to justify dismissal of career civil servants with a supposed ideological bent different from that

tronage appointments dominated state-level politics long before its introduction in Washington during the Jackson presidency. Just as democracy meant an expanded franchise, political patronage came to mean an expanded opportunity to participate in governance as a public servant. Despite the insistences of later reformers, the spoils system was considered, at the time, appropriate in a government becoming less republican and more democratic. Thus the patronage system or "rotation in office" was itself a reform measure when introduced by President Andrew Jackson.

Jackson justified his position by arguing four main points. First, his policies would give ordinary citizens a greater chance to serve in the public sector by rotating employees as political fortunes changed. Second, the spoils system permitted Jackson to remove superannuated personnel. Older government employees remained in office far past their useful working careers, protected by family ties and convention. To say the least, their presence reduced effectiveness and limited opportunities for younger personnel to assume positions of responsibility. Third, the spoils system eliminated the abuses of nepotism (Rohr, 1978). William Dickson, writing in 1832, supported Jackson's viewpoint, observing that with a reasonable rotation, every citizen of political aspirations and experience ... may hope to crown his family with the reflected honor which office confers ... This is the peerage which the republic offers ... (in White, 1958, p.292). Jackson also felt that by rotating offices through political appointments officials would be forced to be more responsive to public interests. If jobs depended upon the political party, and the continuance of the party in office depended upon a satisfied electorate, then the bureaucrats would be forced to accommodate voters' wishes. Jackson also felt that tenure in office was unnecessary because, "the duties of all public officers are so plain and simple that men of intelligence

may readily qualify themselves for their performances" (White, 1954, p.30). The reluctance to fully embrace civil service "reform" in both Ohio and Mexico are rooted in these same views.

Despite the easy label of "corrupt practice" attached to patronage systems, the conflict between the goal of a neutral and objective civil service and the objectives of patronage remain relevant today. No system is based purely upon objective civil service precepts of objectivity, neutrality and merit analysis. At some point every system gives way to the primacy of "politics" in the selection of certain personnel. While we judge most civil service systems by the *infrequency* of such hires, no system operates without such political appointments. As Francis Rourke (1992) observed, both political responsiveness and administrative professionalism remain highly ranked values in a democratic bureaucracy.

The question at hand is where to draw the line? The experience of the United States again is instructive. From the very beginning attributes other than strict job descriptions and paper qualifications were critical to being selected for a position. In the late eighteenth century, the equivalent of being a party member was to have served in the Revolutionary Army, or the government. Connections, through the shared experience of attending one of the four or five universities in the country, were equally important. This was a government by an educated elite, performing rather specialized tasks. Only later, as the size of the government grows does the diversity of the types of jobs available also grow. No longer are all jobs idiosyncratic. Literally hundreds may be asked to perform quite similar and routine tasks. The need for an exclusively educated elite for the majority of jobs ended long before Andrew Jackson came to office. He probably would advocate what we call today "job simplification" precisely because many jobs require minimal skill and/or experience. But, to conjure up images of an unruly and uneducated rabble dominating public employment was wrong. By focusing on the more critical and higher-level positions Crenson (1975) found that

of the current administration. Indeed, one of the primary tasks of public administration theories in the 1970s and 1980s has been to reconcile the administrative state with American conceptions of democracy and constitutionalism.

Jackson's appointees were no less educated than those of Washington, Jefferson or Quincy Adams. Open hiring was possible for other jobs, because the jobs themselves required little education, experience or sophistication (Cox, Buck and Morgan).

From the start of the so-called spoils system, a dichotomy existed between open hiring and political appointment. All owed their appointment to an elected or party official, but some positions were filled simply to fulfill a political obligation and others were filled to fulfill a specific political need. This is *not* a trivial distinction. Furthermore, *from virtually the start of the spoils era some positions were regarded as too complex to be subjected to the vagaries of patronage*. Thus, by the mid-1840s, the U.S. Naval Observatory was using written examinations and educational requirements to screen applicants for positions as astronomers at the Observatory. The practice of using "non-political" methods of selection for certain professional and technical positions continued throughout the spoils era (Cox, Buck, and Morgan; see also Hoogenboom, 1968).

The Long Road to a Merit System

Emerging from the military reforms of the late eighteenth century in Prussia and Sweden, the concept of a modern civil service appeared nearly simultaneously in several countries in Europe. The parallels between the ideal model of civil service and the Weberian bureaucracy (Gerth and Mills, 1946) are striking. Both have a bias for salaried professionals, who are required to fit the job, over what Weber describes as the dilettante, or the patronage appointee.

Initial steps toward reform were made during Lincoln's administration. In 1863, John Bigelow wrote an evaluation of the French customs service; the report included recommendations for competitive examinations. In 1864, Senator Sumner introduced a civil service reform bill calling for examinations and promotions based on seniority and merit, but the bill was tabled (Fish, 1963). Also in 1864, Congressman Thomas Jenckes introduced the first of his many bills

dealing with civil service reform. This bill was defeated as were bills introduced in 1865, 1867, and 1868. The 1868 bill was accompanied by an extensive report on several foreign civil service systems, and furnished much information to the civil service reform movement (Van Riper 1958, p. 68).

In 1871, the first modern civil service legislation passed as a rider to a civil appropriation bill. It read:

Sec. 9 That the President of the United States be, and he is hereby, authorized to prescribe such rules and regulations for the admission of persons into the civil service of the United States as will best promote the efficiency hereof, and ascertain the fitness of each candidate in respect to age, health, character, knowledge, and ability for the branch of service into which he seeks to enter; and for this purpose the President is authorized to employ suitable persons to conduct said inquiries, to prescribe their duties, and to establish regulations for the conduct of persons who may receive appointments in the civil service (Van Riper, p. 68).

Much to congressional surprise, President Grant acted on the legislation, appointing a seven-man commission with George Curtis, a leading reformer, as chairman. The legislation, which is still in force, is remarkable for three reasons. First, it gave the President authority over federal personnel management. Second, it provided a central personnel agency to the government. Third, it provided the President with the first instance of advice and assistance that typifies modern line and staff relationships. Unfortunately, the Commission failed when Congress refused to renew its funding in 1873 and 1874 (Cox, Buck and Morgan).

Outside the political structure, the reform movement was organizing. In May 1877, the New York Civil Service Reform Association was founded; in 1881, the National Civil Service Reform League was organized. These reformers supported the candidacy of James Garfield for

President in 1880. Garfield was assassinated in 1881 by a disappointed office seeker, and Chester Arthur, the deposed collector of the New York Custom House, became President. Reform organizations immediately publicized the connection between the murder of Garfield and the spoils system. Dorman Eaton (1881) declared, "...the source and significance of Guiteau's acts have been found in our spoils system of administration" (p.148). Reformers at long last had a powerful image that captured the attention of the public. The reform movement became the principal issue in the 1882 congressional elections. The Republicans suffered severe reversals in the election.

Fear of reprisals, if a Democrat became the next President, spurred members of Congress to consider the legislation of Senator George Pendleton already before the Senate. The legislation came under fire from legislators and party bosses on the grounds that civil service examinations are not only elitist but also unrelated to requisite job skills. Civil service reformers successfully rebutted these arguments. On January 16, 1883, President Arthur signed the Pendleton Act into law (Van, Riper). Reformers were equally successful in state legislatures. Massachusetts and New York quickly followed with laws creating their own civil service commissions (Cox, Buck and Morgan).

The Pendleton Act

The Pendleton Act is based largely on the British civil service model. The central concept is appointment by competitive examination, with political neutrality of appointment as a vital corollary. The Act established a Commission comprised of three full-time members. Initially, commissioners were to serve indefinite terms, but in 1956 a system of staggered, renewable six-year terms of office was established. A Chief Examiner was to administer the system. A six-month probation for all appointees was put in place, no drunkards could be hired, only references as to character and residence were to be accepted from Senators and Representatives, appointments were

to be made from those receiving the highest grades (thus allowing some discretion by the employer), and criminal sanctions were established for corrupt administration of the exam (Van Riper).

Provisions for practical tests and for entrance at any level of office *are uniquely American*. In 1900-1901, fewer than 200 of the 1477 civil service appointments required more than a secondary school education. Theodore Roosevelt, a civil service commissioner, tried –and failed– to require cattle inspectors to pass a test on branding, reading, shooting, riding mean horses, and roping and throwing steers (White, 1954). To guarantee congressional support, appointments were awarded to citizens of various states in proportion to the states' population. No more than two members of the same family could hold public office (Van Riper).

Municipal and state laws followed the federal pattern by using a board of commissioners and by emphasizing testing for job entry. In fact, state laws frequently were much broader in scope. For example, the Massachusetts law of 1884 applied prospectively to all state officials. It required a specific exemption in statute for employees to be left out of the civil service system. Thus, within a relatively short period most employees were covered. In contrast, only about ten percent of federal positions were placed in the classified civil service; the remainder were left to be brought under the Act at the President's discretion, and even then, laborers and those whose appointments were subject to congressional approval were exempt (Cox, Buck and Morgan). It would be fifty years or more before something approaching "full coverage" was achieved.

POLITICAL NEUTRALITY

Herbert Kaufman (1956) suggested that the three cornerstones of public personnel administration are *executive leadership, representativeness, and neutral competence*. The changing understanding of personnel practice is based largely on the

changing emphasis on one of these three cornerstones. The core concept of the civil service reform movement of the late nineteenth century represented an emphasis on neutral competence.

In the last three decades, the centrality of neutral competence has been challenged. In the 1970s, advocates of the "New Public Administration" chose to emphasize *representativeness*. Thus, the bureaucrat was to be a policy advocate who exercised independent judgment and who struck a pro-client attitude in the management of operations. The ideal was the model of the street-level bureaucrat who knew very well the problems of his "clients" and exercised any available organizational discretion on their behalf. The bureaucrat became the representative of these groups, advocating programs for them before the central administration. Emphasis on the concept of bureaucracy as the "fourth branch" of government also distanced this group from the philosophical advocacy of executive leadership. Advocates of the new public administration sought policy activists who would use the power of government to help the "underclass" and, on the other hand, sought advocates of a view that partisan politics must be held at arms' length. These "citizen advocates" are as ready to fight City Hall, as they are to support it.

The period from the late 1970s through the early 1990s brought a reaction to the new public administration. The work of politically conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation sought to re-emphasize *executive leadership* as the core concept in personnel management. These groups reintroduced concepts of bureaucracy from the 1930s, when an earlier generation of academics sought to reshape the bureaucracy in support of a President with whom they agreed politically and ideologically. This viewpoint (in contrast to the 1930s efforts) explicitly rejects the concept of neutral competence. The "proper" role of the bureaucrat is to seek the interests of the President. This attitude is derived from efforts to distinguish between statutory enactments and regulations. Regulations are deemed nothing more than the embodiment of the discretionary choices of prior administrations.

For a bureaucrat to continue to enforce regulations created by prior administrations is defiance of the President. Keys to understanding this perspective are, first, to recognize the fundamental assumption that bureaucracy is not a fourth independent branch but merely an extension of the President and his policies and, next, to accept the idea that neutral competence is meaningless; and, therefore, only obeisance to executive leadership can serve as the cornerstone of personnel management and practice.

Today, support for the concept of *political neutrality* comes from diverse perspectives that originated among public choice theorists (Savas, 1982, 1987; Butler, 1985). Public choice theory was adapted by those in the "reinventing government" movement (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) and now is a core tenet of the New Public Management. These perspectives share the notion that those in the private sector are better managers. The solution to the problem of inefficient government is to imitate private business practices, or better yet, simply privatize operations (even personnel functions). If a private company runs government operations, then, presumably, politics is negated. At a minimum, the standards by which to judge operations are those of the business firm. These views even call into question the advisability of a career civil service (Devine, 1987; Heatherly and Pines, 1989). This is the political environment within which civil service reform takes place today.

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM IN SUMMIT COUNTY³

In 1984 voters of Summit County Ohio approved a significant restructuring of the government of that county. A central feature of the political initiative to approve a new home-rule, Charter was the public and media perception that the civil service system was broken (Clark, 1979). Restructuring ranged beyond changes in civil service.

³ Much of the information presented in this section is derived from a study of the Summit County personnel system by the Department of Public Administration & Urban Studies, The University of Akron (January 2002-May 2003).

However, the popular expectation was the new Charter would create a more efficient and professional civil service. In reality, there was no civil service “system” *per se*. The authority to implement basic personnel practices (see Appendix A for a general description of such practices) rested with the state government. Until January 1985, Summit County was in a position, not unlike municipalities in Mexico; the government had no authority to change the personnel system, nor did they even perform basic personnel functions. Beyond recruiting and salaries the county had no authority.

The public did not make such fine distinctions. To the extent that the personnel system was “broken,” the public blamed county officials, not the state. Conventional wisdom was that the system was unprofessional and possibly even corrupt (Clark). The assumption was that people were hired because of their “connections” and “politics,” not credentials and experience. The popular stereotype of the lazy, not very smart, public employee seemed all too real. Even elected officials, who were advocates of public employees, agreed that drastic measures were required (Clark, pp. 10-11).

Yet, the initial Charter reform produced little change in the civil service system. The restructuring of the Summit County government pursuant to the Charter revision has been painfully slow. There was no precedent then, or now, for a “home rule” county in Ohio. To this day some elements of the county government operate under state statute because the County Council (the legislature for the county) has never approved regulations to supercede state law. These problems are most acute in the area of personnel (Foster, Freas and Wilson, 2002). In programs in which federal and state dollars pay for activities (i.e. welfare and children’s services) state rules, even state job titles, are still used eighteen years after the county was authorized to make changes. In these instances the barrier was a reluctant state bureaucracy unwilling to permit the county to “go its own way” (Foster, Freas and Wilson).

Because of the failure to make changes in personnel practices, the public again pushed for

change. In 1995 a second public referenda was held, this time making changes specifically in the county personnel system. Voters approved creation of a Human Resources Commission (HRC) to “provide a fair, efficient, and economical system of county employment ensuring that persons are employed without discrimination. The Commission hears all appeals previously under the jurisdiction of the State Personnel Board of Review” (See Summit County website, www.summitoh.net, November 12, 2002). The Commission was responsible for a complete revamping of the county personnel system, including rules and regulations concerning job analysis, the classification system, performance measures, promotional examinations and grievance procedures.

Some of this work was completed, but little was ever presented to the County Council for final approval (Foster, Freas and Wilson). Under the County Charter (Section 6.04) the Commission is required to create a position/salary classification system, incorporating “broad-banding” and an equitable salary structure. This aspect of reform has received more attention than other aspects of the HRC mandate. The County has twice attempted to revise the salary classification system. The second effort was conducted under a contract with the University of Akron (2002-2003). One of the co-authors of this chapter served as Principal Investigator (PI) and among other things sought to address the issue of broad-banding.

Current Personnel Reform

With the election of a new County Executive in November 2000, changes in the personnel system reemerged on the policy agenda. The centerpiece of the change was a renewed look at the salary classification system (the University of Akron project). Currently, the County operates at least six salary plans

- Three for classified employees,
- One for most unclassified employees,
- One for the Veterans’ Commission employees, and

- Multiple systems in collective bargaining agreements.

That salary structure is based upon a consultant's study from 1997. A key provision of the salary system was to be the use of merit-based performance appraisals to determine salary increases for employees. However, partly because the County Council was unconvinced that the performance appraisal system in place was workable, in 1999 the Council rejected this element of the current pay system. The salary system was implemented but there was no provision for employees can get a pay raise, except through a general wage increase, or a promotion. Although "real" promotions are infrequent, many employees get pay raises by being assigned a new job title. Thus, the current practice is a perpetual game of title changes to adjust salaries.

There are other defects. For example, educational requirements are non-existent for virtually all positions, even for some professional and technical positions. Furthermore, the qualifications for most jobs are so minimal anyone can qualify. Ultimately, political connections become as good as any a basis for hiring. This ensures that "the way we have always done it" is the watchword. "Title-shopping" is rampant. There is neither a mathematical, nor a career basis, for salaries in the three salary systems for classified employees. The operational basis for having three salary systems for classified employees (administrative, technical, professional) was never applied to actual positions. Salary comparability was not a factor in developing the salary system for employees.

Morale among county employees is low. The "system" is stacked against a person who seeks a *career* in the public service. It is little wonder anyone stays. The salary system is "upside-down." Employees most likely to be paid an "equitable" wage are those in the lowest pay categories. Technical professionals and the senior managers are the most likely to suffer salary compression. Those with more experience, training and responsibility have less comparable salaries. Furthermore, having to train new em-

ployees, who start at salaries considerably higher than your own, tries the patience and goodwill of any employee. Managers must fiddle and finagle the system simply to recognize the worth of a good employee. New ideas about practices and processes are rare in Summit County.

The defects in the system are instructive. They are instructive because of political and popular reaction to the system. After twenty years of government under a new Charter, the perception of "corruption" and simple incompetence among county employees remain. Equally important, it is the salary system that is at the heart of problems. Unless employees and politicians view the salary system as fair, the entire civil service system is suspect. Thus, civil service reform, in Summit County, as in the State of Mexico, begins with the salary structure, not other elements of a civil service system.

THE SUMMIT COUNTY PERSONNEL SYSTEM IN PERSPECTIVE

What are the lessons of the continuing efforts to reform the civil service system in Summit County? Drawing upon experience with the salary classification study and interviews with Summit County officials, key lessons are:

Perceptions. The public perceives that the traditional civil service system currently in place in the City of Akron is the "right" way to do things. Thus, the less rule-driven and structured system of Summit County suffers by comparison. The city system remains the exemplar (Collins, 2002). Until the County system "looks" like the City model in the public mind it is defective. As with any broadly held public attitude, these views are not limited to the public. The "victims" of the current system, county civil service employees, are the most vocal and cynical about the county arrangement. Most of the reform efforts of Summit County have been directed toward addressing public perceptions, rather than a formal analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the present system. The creation of the Human Resources

Commission was driven by public perceptions, not the need for such an organization.

Charter reform. Charter amendments do not guarantee reform. The sweeping change implied by the words of the new Charter and the Charter amendment creating the Human Resources Commission (HRC) have produced only incremental change. Changes begun twenty years ago have never fulfilled public expectation. The implementation of change is more complicated and time-consuming than the public desires and taxes public patience. Both formal and informal politics come into play. Changes introduced by altering the legal framework were an end in itself. It became a symbol of reform, without a concomitant desire for the realities of reform. Few in politics and few within the state or county bureaucracy were truly interested in reform. Complicating the process still more, the state has put numerous roadblocks in the way of implementation. Few political leaders are interested in the “details” of reform or the new practices that those reforms imply. To paraphrase Rohr (1986), in the modern era it is easier to make a constitution than “to run a constitution.”

Salaries. Mechanisms for determining initial salaries and for calculating salary adjustments are at the heart of the matter. Morale problems among employees and perceptions of “corruption” by the public are based upon the administration of the salary classification system. Old-fashioned ideas of hiring good people and keeping them are still the basis of the public assessment of personnel systems. At the most critical and “public” levels, the County does neither well. Those most adversely affected by salary incongruities are senior staff and those in technical occupations (Foster, Freas and Wilson). This disparity is derived from two phenomena. First, the most visible appointees—those selected through patronage processes—have low salaries to avoid a public uproar. The salary survey from the University of Akron study showed that persons with similar responsibilities in non-patronage positions in other regions of the country (i.e. “professionals” such as county managers and their deputies) receive considerably

higher salaries. The form of hire actually depresses the salary that is acceptable to the general public. Second, technical professionals, most of whom are hired based upon academic and professional credentials, have low salaries because they must remain below that of their politically-appointed bosses.

The dilemma of performance appraisal. Nothing is more vexing in the development of a county civil service system than the ambivalence toward merit-based raises. Public employee unions, many politicians and employees are almost universal in their opposition to such a concept. One reason for this is that few employees, or supervisors, believe that any of the existing methods for assessing merit in performance are fair or realistic. If everyone is deemed “satisfactory” regardless of performance, then merit-based salary systems become experience-based systems. If employees believe that ratings are based upon the whims or prejudices of supervisors, then they will seek the “refuge” of longevity pay to protect themselves from the unfairness and inequities of the system. Finding a performance appraisal system that can be implemented easily, and is credible with employees and supervisors, is akin to the search for the Holy Grail. The 1999 salary reforms in Summit County collapsed with the failure to find a performance appraisal system that the County Council could agree was fair. Politics played a negative role. For those who know how to manipulate the “merit-system,” the lack of an adequate performance appraisal process is an advantage. This has been the situation in Summit County for many years (Foster, Freas and Wilson).

Promotion and retention. The public image of the Summit system was of a government overburdened with inefficient and incompetent employees who worked for the county because no one else would hire them. The near classic image of government as the employer of last resort became a self-reinforcing image as the public vigorously opposed salary increases by applying the dual logic that county employees were already overpaid and under-worked. Thus, dedicated professionals entering the public ser-

vice encounter low wages, long hours and few rewards. The University of Akron study found the system has devolved into a shell-game of title changes and phantom promotions. Professionals working in positions requiring substantial education and experience for appointment are left with virtually no means of promotion or career advancement. Not surprisingly, turnover among technical professionals is higher than in other job classes (Foster, Freas and Wilson).

The focus on salary levels and career advancement has had one positive benefit: the salaries of county technical professionals were the focal point of analyses in 1997 and 2002. Recruitment and retention of competent technical professionals have become a universal concern among politicians and manager. The first salary analysis helped raise salaries, but other defects in the system meant that the results were less than positive. The 2002 salary analysis emphasizes both current salary comparability and a career perspective.

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM IN THE STATE OF MEXICO

The Policy Process

As in much of the world, politics dominates policy processes in the State of Mexico. Issues and concerns that emerge as “policy issues” have been reviewed and discussed by political parties and certain interest groups before being presented to Congress by the executive. Any policy option under review is the product of coalition building and consensus decision-making within the dominant political parties. This is a process dominated by “elites,” both inside and outside of government. Policy making in the State of Mexico is influenced by two groups; one, the political party in power (represented by the governor of the state) and two, economic groups, primarily managers⁴. Policy decisions by the government

stem from agreements among: a) large private corporations, b) organized interest groups, such as labor unions and c) managerial groups.

Minority social organizations are excluded and in some parts of Mexico have resorted to confrontation and urban disorder. For example, civil service reform initiatives currently under consideration are the result of consensus among the political parties in Mexico (National Action Party and Institutional Revolutionary Party) and the Federal Executive. In the State of Mexico, policy making and decision-making are tightly controlled by a small number of persons, groups and party leaders. In a “closed” system in which few participate, the influence of the managerial sector and the larger education sector unions and public employees is considerable in public policy formation. Peasant groups, grassroots and neighborhood organizations have less influence. A rare instance of success by “outsiders” is the case of the San Salvador Atenco peasants, who sought more equitable payment for lands expropriated for a new airport. The concerns of the peasant landowners for many years were met with political indifference. The financial commitments already made by the State of Mexico were considerable, yet the protest was successful. The airport project was canceled and the land expropriation project abolished.

In the State of Mexico, the executive authority has the preponderant role in policy formulation. The Governor introduces most initiatives. Historically, the Governor’s party (for most of the last seven decades, PRI) also held the majority in the state Congress, seemingly guaranteeing an initiatives’ approval. Support of the party is still necessary to ensure a vote in favor of the governor’s initiatives. Even when the Governor and the Congress come from the same party, gaining votes may not be as easy as it would appear. The conflicts and controversies that mark multi-party systems are not present. However,

⁴ Numerous actors have influence in short-term policy making. Union leaders have influence in order to obtain better wages and social benefits, but their influence is not focused on long-term policy making. For example, the government is encouraging

foreign enterprises to locate in the State of Mexico. The unions have not participated in the agreements about labor conditions, nor have they expressed concern about worker exploitation because low wages are considered good for attracting foreign investment.

as in the United States, the interests and concerns of the members of Congress and the Governor may not match. The absence of democratic practices remains an important part of the State of Mexico's government, particularly in the executive. Changes in response to the concerns of the people are nearly impossible. This suggests a political culture that condones arbitrary decision-making by agency administrators and party officials, social discrimination, authoritarianism in governmental decisions, the absence of public debate for making policies. Many political decisions are influenced by particular political events. For example, decisions at the federal level in Mexico may result in support for, or rejection of, those decisions at the state level, depending on the party in control. Program analysis, and possibly even the ability to implement the program itself, is secondary to the need to "respond" to events. The announcement of new programs and allocation of resources is dictated by perceptions of "support," not an assessment of the validity and efficacy of the program itself.

Effective policy formulation and implementation have at least two major problems. First, is the absence of continuity in the development of the policies. Second, is the hegemony of the particular interests that block other policies. The absence of continuity of policies and projects is the result of elections, which produce a change of governors, who then remove many personnel from their positions. Also, governors wish to start new programs that can be identified as coming from them, not others (Olascuaga and Mena, September 20, 2002). The second problem results from the political ambitions and interests of those inside government. Administrators strive to be noticed to enhance the opportunity to gain a high level political appointment. Good performance hopefully results in being chosen by the governor for higher office (Olascuaga and Mena). However, administrators also may seek advancement by discounting and discrediting the policies and programs of rivals. Policies that have some success are attacked as a means of discrediting the promoter of the policy and thus "promote" the ambitions of another. Policy success makes

a program and its author a threat. In such an environment, few policy initiatives succeed for very long. Nothing is accomplished. Office "seeking" replaces program performance as the best route to promotion.

Policy formulation and implementation are more complicated and contentious in Mexico than seventy years of one-party control of the national government would imply. The decline of the PRI at the federal level was preceded by more than a decade of change at the state and local levels. There are effectively three "majority" parties in various regions of Mexico, not one. This alters the top-down system of political control in which the federal government dominates local decision-making. Those at the state and local level are no longer necessarily of the same party and, therefore, may have very different policy goals. Until 1990 federal policy, whether on personnel or another issue, would be set in Mexico City and then diffused through state and local governments. After 1990, the party in control of a state or municipality might have a different agenda. Change no longer comes exclusively from Mexico City. Central decision-making is now supported or rejected according to political views and attitudes at different levels of government. There is no strict discipline about the decisions coming from the national government. As a consequence, initiatives of federal policy-makers are rejected or modified based upon the interests and concerns of the majority in a particular government and state.

Historical Review of Personnel Policy

Given the centralist tradition of this country, it should not be surprising that most civil service reform efforts have been at the federal level. As difficult as it has been at the federal level to implement administrative reform, implementation of reform at the local level has been all but impossible. Even minimum efforts have not yet been made at the local level.

The implementation of civil service in Mexico is an old aspiration. Early efforts for civil service reform were made prior to the Mexican

Revolution, 1910-1921. None of these efforts were successful. The resolution of political or economic issues always seemed to take precedence. Reform proposals would be introduced, but the time and political momentum to push through such changes would be diverted to other seemingly more pressing issues. After the Mexican Revolution, political interests focused primarily on stability and control of the country. Lacking either stability or control, appropriate conditions for reform, especially civil service reform, were rarely present.

Civil service reform efforts have focused on the structure and mechanisms of civil service, rather than on the employees within the system. Although weak, a civil service statute was promulgated in 1938 under the direction of President Cardenas, 1934-1940 (Moctezuma and Roemer, 1999: 160). The statute created two categories of employees: unclassified (patronage), and classified. The change expanded opportunities for people to seek careers in government service, not dictated by patronage considerations. Nevertheless, loyalty to the leader permeated the organizational culture. For appointment to most positions, political connections were essential. This may be considered Mexico's "spoils system." Although a single party political system dominated national government, political groups inside the party promoted their own vested interests. Politicians used their control of "patronage" for monetary and other tangible benefits for themselves. Much as occurred in urban areas of the U. S. in the nineteenth century public administration positions were seen as economic rewards. They were not viewed as opportunities for achieving higher performance in the public sector.

Twenty years ago President Miguel de la Madrid, an instrumental figure pushing for structural change in the economy, fought corrupt practices through the creation of a national program called "Moral Renovation of the Society." This proposal included a program for creating a civil service career system. The program would have established the practice of recruitment and appointment by competitive examination and promotions based on merit. Economic problems

in the country, however, pushed this and other initiatives into the background. Ultimately the proposal failed, though the need for an alternative to patronage appointments, especially in positions requiring specific educational achievement and competencies was affirmed. Since then many attempts have been made to promote and implement civil service reform. Unfortunately, each attempt has been defeated. Political and economic barriers have been the principal obstacles to reforming civil service. There were three primary reasons for this failure. First, economic pressures caused administrative reforms to fail. Secondly, considerable opposition came from employee unions. Unions considered the establishment of civil service reforms a threat to their objectives. Unions viewed themselves as representing an alternative to civil service, not a partner. Third, reforms met with resistance from the bureaucratic elite, especially in the administration of President Zedillo (1994-2000). Bureaucratic infighting halted progress in civil service reform.

Abuses of administrative discretionary authority and corrupt government practices remain a problem in both federal and local (i.e. both the state and municipal levels) public administration. Attempts at reform have done little to mitigate these problems. Broad-based civil service reform has not occurred at the state or municipal level. The reform "strategy" at the local level seems to be little more than a "hope" that eventual approval of federal civil service reform will encourage the administrative reform modifications at local levels. Change, when it has occurred, has been piecemeal and incremental. A few states have initiated reform efforts, but only within the framework of federal proposals. Any state initiative must be done with one eye on the policies and preferences of the federal government. State reforms must conform to federal rules. Even when state reform is underway, federal proposals may redirect or negate those reforms⁵. Yet the need for state and municipal level reform is criti-

⁵ The Mexican centralist tradition barred local governments from taking policy initiatives. However, with the political changes since 1982, local governments have won some autonomy. The

cal. It is also important to stress that local government may be a logical place to begin civil service reform, thus generating more effective delivery of scarce public goods and services directly to the people.

New conditions—the success of the National Action Party (PAN) in 2000—make reform possible in Mexico. For the first time in more than 70 years a President from a different political party was elected. The Governors of several large states are from the same political party as the President. A comprehensive civil service reform package from president Fox was approved in April 2003. The main characteristics of the legislation are: the appointment by competitive selection through public postings; promotions based on performance evaluation; training programs, compensation in the event of job loss; and performance appraisal to evaluate individual employees every five years. Unlike many civil service initiatives, which made changes in only some aspects of personnel or applied to only a few classes of employees, this legislation is broad in scope. It applies to all personnel levels—from the lowest levels to general managers. Coordinated reform may be possible⁶.

Current Personnel Practices and Change Initiatives

Change at the state level proceeds slowly. In 1996 a modernization process began within public administration in the State of Mexico. Silvia Pérez Campuzano, a former Director of Human Resources, initiated a program to reorganize the public service. She modified procedures and developed a salary classification system. These were administrative actions. In order to assure

continuity of initiatives there needed to be changes in law. With support from the Governor, legislation was drafted and several initiatives presented to the local congress. A goal of this modernization was the professionalization of public personnel employees. This process began with the enactment of special legislation. In 1998, “The Law of Job for the State and Municipal Public Servants” was approved. The law was designed to:

- Provide stability in employment,
- Provide salary protection, and
- Provide a structured scheme for the professionalization of public sector personnel.

The following year broader legislation was enacted and regulations were established containing administrative mechanisms for enforcing the special law. The change created a single salary structure for all public employees, though it distinguished employees based upon appointment authority. Civil service regulations concerning appointment and promotion apply only to “classified” and unionized employees in ranges 1-23. Employees in ranges 24 to 32 are advisers, technicians, general managers, Under Secretaries and Secretaries. These are “unclassified” employees. Leaders of administrative units have discretion to make such appointments. Although spread across eight salary ranges, unclassified employees are less than two percent of all employees in this sector (Dirección General de Personal, September 2002).

Progress in implementing the salary classification is slow. Employees at the lowest levels of the pay structure are essentially unskilled and semi-skilled workers. There are few, if any, job qualifications. Any random group of persons would yield more than enough candidates for appointment. The result has been that “political influence” is still used to help distinguish one employee from another. This is reminiscent of U.S. President Andrew Jackson’s dicta that no job should be beyond the capability of the average person. Then, as now in Mexico, the potential

Federal government, no matter what majority party, has emphasized the importance of administrative reform, including a civil service reform. Despite its diminished influence, this has served as a catalyst for several local governments to professionalize personnel processes. At the time of this research (September, 2002), only the states of Veracruz and the State of México have implemented regulations for a civil service system.

⁶ The reform of civil service in Mexico is linked with democratic changes. Consequently, since 1982, presidents and political parties have made civil service reform a priority (Mendez, 1994 and 1998).

pool of “qualified” applicants far exceeds the number of vacant positions. Jackson felt, as do many state and local politicians in Mexico and the United States, party loyalty is as good a method of distinguishing among a large pool of applicants as any other. While there is some logic to this rationale, it is nonetheless ripe for corruption. Furthermore, because of the political “attractiveness” of patronage hiring for these employees, there is little support among senior administrators or politicians to convert these positions to a classified system. These are “classified” employees in name only; hiring is still based upon patronage considerations.

The problem is not with the lowest rungs of the salary structure. Nor is it at the upper levels where the exigencies of politics and policy making may require political appointment. It is in the mid-range positions, many of which straddle the classified, unclassified ranges. These are the administrative, professional and technical positions that require specific education, experience and competencies to be successful. These are positions for which job experience and, therefore, employment “continuity” is critical for the effective delivery of services. These are the classic “bureaucrats” that drive the machine of government. This is the area of government that would “benefit” most from the introduction of merit hiring. A effective and efficient government is impossible without a cohort of competent and skilled employees in these mid-level positions. “Merit” hiring is critical. Unfortunately, as long as hiring for positions below the mid-level remain under “patronage,” hiring for mid-level positions also remain under patronage. The entire reform process has nearly come to a halt (Olascuaga and Mena).

In 1999 the reform process shifted from a focus on hiring to the promulgation of regulations to establish a formal and regular procedure for assigning employees to the correct range in the salary classification system. A catalogue of positions was created. The catalogue included specific descriptions of each job, skills and competences required, and expected salary range (Olascuaga and Mena). The cataloguing of po-

sitions is an important task, especially because the “classification” process is stalled. Two exceptions were applied to this process before it was even implemented. Personnel in the education sector were not included, because they have their own career norms and salary classification system. Also, unionized employees already hired or “in-the-pipeline,” were exempted. The three criteria used to apply the newly developed catalogue are:

- Longevity of service,
- Performance appraisal, and
- Training.

The process evaluated each of the three criteria and each one was given a value: 20% for longevity of service, 35% for performance appraisal, and 45% for training and education (Regalement, p. 100). Using these values, personnel were assigned to the correct range in the salary classification system. Promotion into different categories will be accomplished after the first step is completed. The new criteria (testing, experience, training, and competence) will be strictly applied to all new employees.⁷ The next step will be the establishment of periodic performance evaluations and training for employees. In the State of Mexico, currently, there is no available instrument for performance evaluation. However, some instruments have been designed and are being tested as a pilot program in one department, the Finance Ministry. Performance evaluation takes into consideration attitude, effectiveness, and

⁷ Even though evaluation of job conditions is a key element for assigning employees to a range in the salary classification system, questions have been raised about the criteria applied. One of the strongest criticisms of civil service in the United States is the use of longevity of service as an element for promotion. The concern is that longevity of service develops conformism. Furthermore, it is public perception that public servants guaranteed a job in the public sector are presumed to be less responsive to public interests. The fear is that civil service employees will become less efficient and incompetent. In the state of Mexico, the value given to longevity of service is proportionally higher in comparison with the other two criteria – performance evaluation and training. One solution may be to consider longevity as an essential element for competence in specific positions (which require more experience), but longevity should not have equal value to training and performance evaluation, because these are activities more in keeping with critical abilities and skills.

personal initiative of individual employees. Sample tests have been created for each criterion. Supervisors must complete an evaluation form for each employee.

THE STATE OF MEXICO PERSONNEL SYSTEM IN PERSPECTIVE

What are the lessons of the continuing efforts to reform the civil service system in the State of Mexico?

Traditional versus modern approaches. At the same time that steps have been taken to professionalize public sector employees, government-led efforts toward administrative reforms have emphasized and encouraged the imitation of the New Public Management, rather than emphasizing traditional civil service systems. The local government department charged with implementing civil service reform distributed to supervisors a questionnaire to assess workplace conditions. Questionnaire results identified employee over-work as the number one problem. Of least concern was the need for a civil service system.

Of particular concern to those who administered the survey was the attitude of middle-level technical professionals. Based upon those responses, the government initiated a process re-engineering program⁸. This change addressed functional and process redesign in order to reorganize administrative unit structures to achieve better results (AMV, September 20, 2002). *However, process engineering and reorganization do not address professionalization, they only address the structural redesign of administrative units.*

Modern notions of management such as the New Public Management (Osborne and Gaebler, 1994) are presented in most countries as an alternative to the traditional civil service system. This creates a contradiction for those who seek

to “reform” public administration in Mexico. *Should the government continue to pursue the introduction and implementation of traditional civil service processes, or should they abandon such efforts in favor of the flexibility of labor processes implied by the New Public Management?* For those who see the pursuit of the classic civil service model as a failure and for those who see it as “outdated,” there is little reason to develop a rigorous public personnel administration. On the other hand, the very conditions that made the implementation of civil service possible may prevent the introduction of the NPM. The ideal seems to be to split the difference to make some changes based upon NPM principles and also implement the civil service. A basic civil service framework of rules for hiring and promotion, mechanisms for performance evaluation and salary systems do not conflict with the tenets of the new public management. A blending may imply that the breadth and scope of civil service coverage will be considerably less than in traditional systems where upwards of 99% of all employees are covered by civil service regulations.

Sources of opposition to reform. Evaluating answers obtained from the survey, it was found that supervisors of administrative units do not consider civil service reform implementation a high priority. *The opposition to civil service reform is linked to two inter-related issues: merit hiring and performance appraisals.* If a merit-based hiring process were implemented, supervisors would have fewer opportunities to hire friends. Stated differently, discretionary authority in future hires would be strictly limited (EO, September, 20, 2002). Similarly, if promotion is based upon performance in the job rather than on who you know, then supervisors will be constrained in the opportunity to treat promotions in much the same way as they do initial hiring; as the prerogative of managers.

Continuity and change. There is an additional problem that relates to process continuity. In Mexico, at local and federal levels, a tradition exists of making changes when each new administration assumes power. In other words, each administration implements change according to

⁸ The objective of the Reengineering program is to reorganize all units of the local government to achieve better performance results. The program was initiated in phases: diagnosis, redesign of the units, development of procedural guidelines for each unit, approval of the project and implementation. At this time procedural guidelines are still being developed.

their concerns. This is similar to the situation experienced in the United States at the end of the “spoils” era, when each election cycle meant that thousands of employees were replaced, even though the political party did not change. This is also in contrast to the early years of the twentieth century in Mexico when one-party rule meant an implied continuity of employment at least through the mid-levels of government. Administrative policies and procedures achieved a certain level of stability and continuity, because there was a relative lack of turnover. The party of power was never all that concerned about mid-level and technical positions. The odd result was that “patronage” hiring became the province of the managers at those mid-levels, not of their political bosses. *Managers within the bureaucracy itself have the most to lose by the introduction of merit-based hiring; therefore, bosses of units in these levels are opposed to the civil service.* Opposition from within has proven far more resistant to change than elected “politicians” and have proven they possess the requisite power to block the professionalization of the civil service. This situation reinforces the idea of the need to focus reform on mid-level technical professionals— to free those with technical and professional skills (those in ranges 24-32) from the grip of non-merit hiring and promotion.

Implementation. The transition of power from one administration to another in the U.S. is one of the primary differences between the American and Mexican bureaucratic systems⁹. In the U.S., the spoils system gave ordinary citizens a greater chance at public service by rotating employees as political fortunes changed (at least in the beginning). As the need for technical competency increased job continuity and effectiveness came to outweigh the value of rotation. “Spoils” became a problem. In the case of Mexico, the spoils system from the very beginning seemingly meant corruption, abuse and illegal enrichment practices and administrative inefficiency. The reality may simply be that the

lesser “importance” and scope of government of the mid-nineteenth century could survive with an unprofessional government. Neither Mexico nor the United States can do so today. While most political figures would agree that such reform is needed, the increasingly complex political situation (three “major” political parties instead of one) makes continuation of civil service reform less certain, particularly if a new political party wins the next election in the State of Mexico. *Ultimately, then, political and administrative institutions have not reached a consensus about reform efforts. Therefore, implementation of civil service reform in the State of Mexico remains uncertain.*¹⁰

STATE OF MEXICO AND SUMMIT COUNTY: AN ANALYSIS OF LESSONS LEARNED

There is much to be learned about civil service reform from the experiences of these governments. While approaching reform from different historical perspectives, each has encountered similar obstacles and challenges. When considered together several lessons may be applicable to a range of jurisdictions in the two countries.

Lesson One

Both the State of Mexico and the County of Summit have struggled to change the realities and the perceptions of their respective civil service systems. Both jurisdictions suffer in comparison to models that are well known by the public (the federal system in Mexico and the U.S. federal and the parallel city system in Akron). The two publics judge their respective systems based upon

⁹ In the case of Mexico, the permanence of a single party in power made government administration an instrument for fulfilling corporative patronage demands of the party and not the voters.

¹⁰ In April (2003), President Fox signed (after an historic agreement among the different parties in the Congress), a law creating a Career Civil Service in the federal public administration. The Ministry of Public Function was created, also. Consequently, the new Ministry and a Commission were assigned responsibility for implementing the law in the federal administration. Since the political party of President Fox (PAN) is different from the government of the State of Mexico (PRI), undoubtedly this federal law will provoke reactions at local levels, with consequences for our case study.

those models. The political leadership of Mexico and Summit battle the public vision of the *proper* way of operating a civil service system. In the view of those interviewed the task of reform and change has been made more difficult because of this “ideal” model. *The first lesson is that any change inevitably seems too little and too inconsequential. No matter what is done, no one is satisfied: neither the public, expecting broader and more rapid change; nor the instigators of reforms.*

Lesson Two

Where does reform begin? The lesson of the slow evolution of the American Civil Service system is instructive. The first efforts to create a classified public service system occurred nearly four decades before the formal creation of the Civil Service Commission. What were those changes? The U.S. Naval Observatory made the logical decision that hiring of astronomers should be done based upon technical competence and educational credentials. The first tests as a prerequisite for appointment were born in that choice. Technically, the creation of first the U.S. Military Academy (West Point) and then the U.S. Naval Academy (Annapolis) established the precedent of educational background as relevant to technical and engineering positions. Yet the issue of examinations for appointments would rage for another four decades.

We see this in both Mexico and Summit. Reform initiatives in Mexico, particularly at the federal level go back seventy years. Reforms are sporadic. The balance between patronage and merit hiring is still debated. In Summit two decades have passed since the first opportunity to create a modern civil service system, yet major components such as workable performance appraisal systems are still not in place. *The second lesson is that reform efforts leap and spurt in fits and starts. There is little pattern. Change will be slow.*

Lesson Three

The corollary to this is that there is common ground in the hiring of technocrats. The pressure to find jobs for people comes from the elite and from the lower strata. Reform begins in the middle ground, where educational and experiential requirements put the job out of the reach of the semi-skilled and the political elite alike. Combining a push for hiring more career-oriented technical professionals with a structural reform agenda (i.e. a salary and position classification system) has advantages for everyone. Even politicians who might oppose civil service on principle (or politics) have little reason to oppose this type of hire. This is the starting point for reform.

The initial focus of civil service style hiring was on technical professionals in the middle. Stated another way, the proof of the efficacy of a civil service system was in the ability to attract and retain competent technical professionals. *This represents the third lesson of our study. Assuring that a system is in place to hire and retain technical professionals who are protected from political change should be a priority.* The dilemma in Summit County was that technical professionals were the most disadvantaged by the partial civil service system and the lack of attention to salary classifications and promotional opportunities. In Mexico, the first persons included in the new salary structure were those employees at the bottom of the organizational structure. While Summit County recognized the need to focus on the “middle” professional, the reforms and changes have as yet not accomplished their goals. In Mexico, the technical professionals straddle the boundary between those included and those not yet included within the salary system.

Lesson Four

A related concern is those employees at the bottom of the organization — those with the fewest skills and the least work background. It can be argued that the use of “merit hiring” for unskilled work is not critical to the overall operations of a civil service system. In fact, as

Andrew Jackson argued in the 1830s, the goal of democratizing government, or the even more basic goal of providing employment, are more vital than the method of hire. Equally important to remember is that the introduction of patronage hiring in the U.S. was made in the midst of a mandate to simplify and structure most public employment so that even those with a relatively minimal education could perform most assignments. The “opening” or democratization of public employment did not come at the expense of technical competence. Its advocates regarded the early version of “spoils” or patronage as a *reform*. It was not aimed at lowering performance, but to enhance performance. Secondly, the locus of change was simultaneously at the top and the bottom of the employment spectrum. Patronage appointments at the top were viewed as vital to successful policy implementation. The job simplification initiative meant that more than a highly educated elite could join the public service. Qualifications for appointment were lowered, but the assumption was that the difficulty of the job had also been lowered.

The continuing conflict in Mexico, between politicians who desire the influence gained through patronage and politicians trying to implement a traditional civil service system, is hardly surprising. The public expects and demands a shift toward civil service systems as a signal of the end of corrupt practices they perceive as part of patronage systems. Yet that same public will expect those politicians to hire them, even if it means going outside the rules. *The fourth lesson is the need to recognize that responsiveness and open hiring has a place in government. Such hiring need not conflict with the broader aim of a profession civil service.*

Lesson Five

A fifth lesson is that salaries are important. By this we do not mean the salary level, but rather the existence of a rationally constructed and internally consistent salary system, including mechanisms for career advancement and promotion as exemplified by the recent changes in Summit

County and the 32-grade system in Mexico. While this may seem obvious, we say this for quite varied reasons. A well-structured salary classification system is the backbone of any good civil service system. A quick test of the efficacy of a salary structure is whether or not the table of organization for any part of the government can be replicated simply by reference to the position allocation and the salary structure. But no salary structure can be created without a proper job analysis methodology, nor can it continue without a fair and consistent performance appraisal system. Secondly, Herzberg was right, while salary adjustments and monetary rewards do not in and of themselves motivate employees, stagnant or “unfair” salaries are a source of discontent. Furthermore, a salary system that cannot demonstrate the possibility of career advancement and development is not likely to encourage employees to pursue a career in the organization.

The lack of a fully implemented salary structure has spared the State of Mexico the problem of developing a workable performance appraisal system. If a “traditional” civil service model is to be introduced, even if only for (but maybe especially for) the middle-level technical professionals, then a credible performance appraisal system must be implemented. Recruiting technical professionals after conducting job analyses and test- and education-driven hiring is only the first step. Retaining professionals must occur on the same basis. If such employees are to stay, then they must be evaluated and rewarded on their merits. Political motives must not influence these assessments. The potential for success of current reform efforts in Summit County hinges on the County Council accepting the importance of performance appraisals.

Lesson Six

There is a need to consistently and continuously apply accepted performance appraisal methods as part of annual salary reviews. One of the things that we sometimes forget is that a civil service system is not merely about current employees;

it is also about their future. *The sixth lesson is that civil service systems are career systems.* By its very creation and implementation the civil service system is designed to offer the opportunity and possibility of a career in the public service free of political or other influences. This is a lesson that has been lost in the race to privatize and deregulate public employment. Public service will change considerably if it becomes little more than the opportunity to collect a paycheck for a few years. The ideal of the public service is as a career. The greatest single failure of both the system in Mexico and the system in Summit County is the lack of clear career paths for professionals.

Lesson Seven

The popular image of government is that of political interference and self-aggrandizement that very rarely produces quality services for the public. Seemingly, “reform” and politics do not mix. The experience in Mexico and Summit are repeated attempts *by politicians* at reform. These reforms sometimes failed for being overly ambitious and sometimes failed for a lack of an advocate in succeeding administrations. But it should also be noted that *bureaucratic infighting as often as “politics” halted progress in civil service reform.* Opposition by bureaucrats in the State of Ohio, who opposed the notion of a “charter” county, as well the ambitions of bureaucrats in Mexico and Summit caused the demise of some reforms. Loss of power and control drives bureaucrats no less than politicians.

CONCLUSIONS

The problems faced in Mexico and Summit are not unique. There are clear lessons for both governments under review and for a broader audience, including practitioners and students. First is the need to recognize the power of the imagery of civil service. It must be recognized that there is no “ideal” civil service model. Yet the public perceives that such a model exists.

Therefore, the public has very low tolerance for practices that adversely affects *their* perceptions of civil service. Few politicians openly or actively flaunt this perception. A “mythical” civil service model shapes and dominates policy concerning public personnel. Even governments, such as the City of Akron, Ohio, which are seen as having model systems, operate their civil service programs differently than perceived.

The public continues to see civil service as a worthy goal—not an unattainable myth. Many of the complaints across the globe about unethical and corrupt government practices center on practices for which civil service were created to abolish (Hope, 1999). The critical issue is finding the balance point – the point where civil service reform is possible without necessarily imitating a century old model of control and management.

Secondly, the virtues of civil service are also its defects. The insistence on a wall between human resources and politics ensures that persons with the proper “paper” credentials will be hired. On the other hand, the political necessity of hiring specific persons is outside the competence and purpose of a civil service system. The wall between human resources endeavors and politics creates suspicion and animosity. Incompatibility of goals means that politically powerful persons will seek to distort or even abolish civil service. Only through politics can civil service systems be modernized and defects corrected. Progress will be slow when the very persons needed to support reform are the advocates of abolition. This is a situation that is rife for manipulation and corruption. There is little to be gained and seemingly much to lose in the adoption of a broad ranging civil service system. Few politicians (or bureaucrats) willingly give up control over appointments. Implementing something seemingly as simple as a salary classification system is made extremely difficult because of this reluctance. The goal is to find places where the defects are a virtue. In the hiring of technical professionals the conflicting views merge. As suggested above, starting “in the middle” works precisely because the patronage pressure is

minimal and the efficacy of credential-based hiring is the greatest.

There is a growing body of literature, labeled the New Public Management, which is highly critical of the core notions of civil service. As suggested earlier, these views parallel those of the first the Public Choice perspective of the 1970s and then the Reinventing Government Movement of the early 1990s. What these perspectives have in common is a deep suspicion of civil service. All favor greater control over personnel decisions in the hands of managers (in the case of public choice theory, politically appointed managers), or even the private sector. Even if these views are rejected (and we as a group reject this premise), the need to “modernize” a system that dates to the nineteenth century is long overdue.

Our recommendation is that civil service systems focus on the core competencies and values that impelled their creation. Those competencies are: job analyses, equitable pay systems, recruitment and hiring of technical professionals and performance measurement. This serves both the need for professional competence and acknowledges the connection between policy-making and politics.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Each question pertains to decision-making, stakeholders, policy-making, and agenda setting in the United States and Mexico. Please respond to each question identifying whether the response is the same or different for each country.

1. How does a policy issue reach the public agenda in the United States? Is the process the same in Mexico?
2. Who are some of the actors that influence agenda setting in the United States? Are actors the same in Mexico?
3. How does political culture influence policy?
4. How do economic conditions influence policy-making?
5. Can you define “stakeholders?” Who are the stakeholders in the United States? Are they the same in Mexico?
6. Is historical “timing” important to successful policy or program implementation? Why? Why not?
7. Describe some of the obstacles administrators may face during program or policy implementation.
8. Do special interest groups influence policy-making?
9. What are the three steps in policy-making? (Formulation, implementation, and evaluation). Discuss each.
10. Is decision-making easier or more complicated in a democracy? Why? Why not?
11. Is decision-making easier or more complicated in single-party systems?
12. Is policy evaluation an important phase of policy implementation?
13. Do political parties play a role in policy-making?
14. How do policy makers know when a policy or program is successfully implemented?

APPENDIX A: CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC PERSONNEL PRACTICE

This chapter has focused more on personnel policy than on personnel administration and practice. Yet we also advocate in our conclusion a focus on the core practices of civil service. What follows is an examination of the evolution of current personnel practices that we define as core practices. The specific practices that are to be examined are job analysis, recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, training, and pay.

Job Analysis

How do we know what kinds of persons to hire? This apparently straightforward question is not particularly easy to answer. We hire people to do a “job.” But how did the job get created? That job was created because someone (or more likely some group) analyzed and examined the tasks assigned to an organization, and then broke down those tasks into discrete activities. When the analysis has reduced the task into manageable clusters of similar activities, those activities are designated as a job.

This particular description is only the first step in actual practice. Job analysis extends beyond the behaviors and activities associated with the performance of a particular job to include the skills, knowledge, and responsibilities needed to be successful in that job (Bureau of Intergovernmental Personnel Programs, 1973). The information gathered about the work activities that constitute a job and the skills associated with those activities put job analyses at the core of personnel practice. The job analysis serves as the foundation of a position classification and pay scheme by relating and grouping jobs. Additionally, the job analysis is the organizing structure of all recruitment, selection, and training activities (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1979).

None of the above activities would be possible in the modern context without the information generated by a job analysis. In the effort to define jobs in a manner that is unrelated to the person in the job (what are the activities and skills needed for the job, not what does the person in the job do), job analysis is the key to any attempt at achieving “neutral competence.” The position classification scheme is based almost completely in the job analysis process. Closely related to position classification and, therefore, job analysis is job evaluation. This process is an attempt to distinguish among jobs (or more likely job classes) for the purposes of pay. The link between job analysis and recruitment, selection and training is still more obvious. The description of skills and competencies necessary to perform a task that is one end result of the job analysis can easily be converted into a job description. The job description in turn serves as the basis for determining who should get a job (recruitment and selection) or what specialized skills are necessary before the job is undertaken (training).

Recruitment and Selection

We have discussed the process of defining and creating jobs so that government may get on with the task of serving the public. The next step is to find the persons with the necessary skills and competencies to perform those jobs. The type of person

sought dominated the recruitment and selection processes throughout the nineteenth century. Historically, the jobs performed in government could be made relatively simple through the division of labor (remember Jackson's dicta that no government job should be beyond the capability of any American). However, by the progressive era, (although arguably by the Civil War period), many government tasks were too complex for persons without specific skills and education. More recently, the idea that good government was the product of performance in the job has gained acceptance. The concern was not willingness to serve, but capacity to serve. Whereas the nineteenth-century concern was to find people to fill government jobs (i.e., recruitment), the twentieth-century concern was to match the skills of the recruit to the demands of the job (i.e., selection).

How does bias, or lack of objectivity, slip into the selection process? Bias occurs in two ways. First, bias may be the product of the conscious or unconscious beliefs of those in decision-making positions (discrimination). The difficulties of minorities in getting hired into government have been attributed to such bias. The other problem of bias is in the nature of the selection process itself.

This latent form of bias is often the product of human nature. We are limited in our knowledge of how to connect selection processes such as examinations and interviews to successful performance in the job. This problem is one of validity: "The key dimension to validity is job relatedness." Job relatedness means essentially that the criteria being measured in the test [selection instrument] are relevant and significant factors in the jobs for which selection decisions are to be made" (Shafritz, Hyde, and Rosenbloom, 1986, pp. 428-429). Also we are limited by the idiosyncrasies of the selection process. Thus, for example, interviews during the selection process can be biased by factors such as the timing of the interview, the character of the other interviews, or the bias of interviewers based on appearance or background. In some instances these forms of bias are conscious, although more typically they are unconscious. This difficulty is exacerbated because such unconscious forms of bias cannot be eliminated. The only way to deal with such a difficulty is to multiply the numbers of selection processes to counteract such biases. For example, if interviews are part of the process of selection, the appropriate practice is to have more than one person conduct interviews to eliminate whatever bias (unconscious) may exist with each individual who serves as an interviewer.

Performance Appraisal

The purpose and goal of performance appraisal is periodically to evaluate the performance of the individual. Such evaluations can be used to determine training needs, pay, or promotion. Performance appraisals are intended as major inputs in determining career directions and opportunities for employees. Yet such efforts are beset by numerous problems.

Few problems have been as vexing to personnel administrators as that of performance appraisal. Certainly it is the most maligned area of personnel and in many cases seems to be tolerated only because no one can think of any realistic, better alternatives. At stake is a process that should control the development and growth of the organization itself. Performance appraisal can be restated as a series of questions: What qualities are we now recognizing, rewarding, and developing in employees? What messages are we conveying to individuals about their behaviors,

skills, and attitudes? And what ideal qualities do we wish to see developed and enhanced in our employees for the accomplishment of our future objectives (Ivancivich and Glueck, 1983)?

The performance appraisal process is central to a merit-based personnel system. Yet that relationship is keyed on the development of a relevant, unbiased, significant, and practical performance appraisal process. These limitations are as often a product of human nature as deficiencies are in the process. Shafritz, Hyde, and Rosenbloom (1986) assess those defects as follows:

1. Appraisals tend to be subjective, impressionistic, and non-comparable
2. The standards of some raters are much tougher than those of other raters.
3. Rating may be more a test of the writing skills of the rater than of the performance of the employee.
4. Goals of performance analysis and potential in future positions may conflict.
5. Lack of credibility and fairness in ratings (pp. 434-436).

The two key problems for the future are to improve the training of supervisors and managers so that they use the appraisal process more properly and to improve the managerial system to restore the credibility of ratings.

Training

One of the uses of performance appraisal is to determine training and developmental needs of employees. Approaches to training have varied widely over the years. Often there has been a tendency to reject training as unnecessary—since the employee should have had the requisite skills to perform the job when hired. This attitude has contributed greatly to the tendency to cut training funds first when fiscal problems emerge.

In the last two decades, the role of training has expanded. First, was the recognition that if minorities were to have a chance at employment, pre-employment and promotion enhancement training programs were needed. Secondly, the approach to jobs that suggests that all the skills that will be needed should be acquired before hiring has been replaced by the recognition of the changing character of many jobs. Training has become a career-long need, even for those who remain in a single field for their entire work life. Third, training has emerged as a way to enhance the skills of those in the job to improve the quality as well as productivity of work performed. Finally, training and development have been promoted as a way to enhance career goals and long-range job prospects.

The creation of the U.S. Federal Executive Institute (FEI) is but one example of innovative ideas in training and career development. The FEI model was the basis for the development of management certification programs in such states as Georgia, North Carolina, Texas and Arizona reflecting a commitment to training as a central feature of a broad-gauged personnel development program. While some still view training as a waste of money and an appropriate starting point for budget cutting—others recognize that success in attracting and keeping skilled public sector employees is based in part in responding to the development needs of those employees. Honing employee skills to perform well now and developing skills to undertake all future challenges on the job must be considered worthwhile investments in human capital.

Pay

One of the great myths of personnel management is that pay is the key personnel motivator. A number of analysts suggest that pay is, at best, a temporary satisfier (Herzberg, 1964). Others also suggest that other factors, such as a sense of accomplishment, may be as important as pay. Finally, it is generally accepted that a broad-based perception among civil servants that public sector salaries are too low is a source of dissatisfaction. Salaries are inevitably problematic. In an environment where the general public regards civil salaries as too high, but the public sector employees see themselves as underpaid, controversy is bound to ensue. Public personnel practice has suffered greatly from a schizophrenic tendency to use pay, and then not use pay, as the way to produce better performance. The result has been to create the worst of all possible worlds: Salaries are low, and good performance does not yield higher pay.

The primary concern in creating public employee pay systems has been equity. While equity can be thought of as having both internal and external components, the focus has most often been on internal equity. Linking pay to the position classification scheme, the emphasis on longevity of service, rather than performance, and the effort to ensure stability of income all reflect the concern for internal equity. These efforts at internal equity are not without difficulty, particularly where they are linked to position classification, job analysis, and performance appraisal processes, which themselves may be deficient. Politically controversial problems such as comparable worth emerge because of defects in the job analysis process that are reflected in the pay scheme rather than in the pay scheme itself. Also, the highly questionable validity and fairness of performance appraisal processes lead many to overemphasize longevity-in-the-job criteria for pay raises, and this discourages superior performance.

Concern about external equity similarly creates controversy. External equity refers to the salaries paid to public employees relative to that paid to private sector employees or other public employees with similar jobs. The central problem is that of the appropriateness of many such comparisons. Should, for example, the salaries of police officers in San Diego, Atlanta, and Indianapolis be the same? Are the jobs of police officers and private security guards the same? Is the job of a middle manager in the Department of Defense handling contracts worth millions comparable to that of a manager in a regional grocery chain? These questions are difficult to answer. At a minimum, an emphasis on comparability results emphasizes average increases and average salary structures. Difference of skills and competencies and differences of circumstances disappear in this process of averaging.

Another concern about compensation involves the structure of the pay scheme. In personnel systems that are not founded on merit, the pay scheme is based on perception of performance and possible connections. Merit-based systems link salaries to the position classification system. Typically merit systems also rely on a salary matrix that provides for increases within a grade for longevity. Under such a system, each position has a salary range designated for it. The employee progresses through the salary range based on performance and longevity.

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